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Ephesians: How Did God Break Through?

Ephesians 2:4-6

Thomas Michael Smith
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Last week we spoke about the wonderful, incredible fact that when we were absolutely helpless and completely without hope, God broke through. God took action. He loved us and did something practical with that love. He came here.

His coming involved many things that are the stuff of the New Testament. Here, in Ephesians 2, in these verses, Paul tells us that one of the ways God broke the destructive pattern in which we were engaged, was to 'make us alive with Christ' by grace -- grace that comes from God. There isn't one thing which man adds to this work of redeeming broken human lives. Grace is God's choice and God's free gift. So the first step is that we are made alive together with Christ, and then comes the second step, we are 'raised us up with Christ' (the RSV in your pews says God 'made us alive together with Christ'). These aren't just phrases used my ministers … these represent realities which have already happened, and which we desperately need to understand.

The Greek word behind 'made us alive with Christ' comes from the root word which means 'he enlivened us,' that is, he gave us life to breathe, as the dry bones in Ezekiel's valley (Ezekiel 37) were made alive. Indeed, this is the central secret of the Christian life. We were made alive in Christ. That happened when you trusted in Jesus and confessed him as your Savior and Lord. I don't know what your feelings were like at that moment. Most people don't experience very much when they become Christians. It's usually a quiet sensation - maybe a slight sense of peace came over you, perhaps a little relieving of your emotions. With some people there is a sense of joy but it usually isn't very dramatic. In most of the cases where I have led someone to Christ, it is usually a very, very quiet kind of thing. And yet it's an incredible thing which had happened! That person has just moved from being dead forever to being alive forever.

Look, if we had a corpse here on the chancel platform this morning, and it had been dead for five days, and if we had known this person in life, but we knew now that he was utterly dead, that he had lost the ability to think, react, communicate, move or live in any sense whatsoever, and if we had the power to lay hands on him so that he came back to life again here and now - hey, this would he heralded all over town within hours, right? We would be astonished at what a miracle had happened. We would give all the glory to God.

And yet that is exactly what Paul says occurs in the inner life of a person when she or he passes from death to life, when the person trusts in and confesses Jesus as Savior and Lord. That same dramatic, completely contrasting condition occurs within us. We are no longer dead forever when we believe. We are alive in Christ. Life has been imparted to us.

Here we are in Ephesians on Mother's Day. So to help us better understand this Scripture, let's think of the whole process of birth. Becoming a Christian is likened to being born again. But where does birth start? We know that it doesn't start with the

actual entrance of the baby into the world. It starts with conception. And conception takes place (ideally) in an act of love when the ovum and the sperm are joined together. But at that point, the mother doesn't know anything about it - she doesn't feel that. Yet a remarkable thing has occurred within her body, something which she doesn't sense, but which nevertheless is going to change her life and perhaps the history of the entire world - as many babies have changed the history of the world when they have grown up. That is exactly the kind of thing which Paul brings to our attention here. When we are born again in Jesus Christ we receive life from him - we are no longer dead forever, no longer unresponsive to God. We are made alive together with Christ.

And when that transition from death to life takes place, when we become born again, I have noticed something happens to our attitude. We simply are not the same person from that time on. It begins to show almost immediately. You can even look for it, and more often than not see it in a new Christian - their self-centeredness ends, momentarily at least, and they begin to think of someone else. They often will say, 'Oh, I wish you would tell this to my brother,' or 'I wish you'd pray about my parents.' Immediately their thoughts turn away from their own great experience to someone else with whom they want to share it. That's a good mark that they have come alive in Jesus Christ.

And there is also a reaction immediately evident in their attitude toward God. Have you noticed that non-Christians are afraid of God? Do you know why? It's because they are afraid of death. Watch non-Christians at a funeral, at one of our memorial services. They are restless and uneasy and nervous, hoping to get the whole thing over as quickly as possible so that they can get back to the familiar surroundings of their home or someplace where they again can escape the thought of death. The Christians who attend aren't afraid - they know and trust God, and they sit in prayer or praise, especially if they know that the deceased was a believer. But the others don't like death because it introduces them to the presence of God, and God is someone they are hiding and running from.

But when people become Christians, that changes immediately. Have you ever noticed it? Immediately, God is their Father. They have a sense of belonging. And immediately there is a hunger for God. That is part of what it means to pass from death to life - they begin to live as God intends us to live.

When we are made alive together with Christ, we are joined to him. Jesus said, 'I am the vine and you are the branches.' Can you tell me where the branch ends and the vine starts? No. They are one plant, sharing one life together. We are no longer ordinary human beings. We are new creations, begun again, linked with the life of Jesus Christ. A new identity is given to us.

So, <u>never think of yourself in any other way</u>, because the whole work of the enemy is to get you to disbelieve that, and to go back to thinking that you are just an ordinary individual, struggling on through life, trying to make it the best way you can, needing to mobilize all your human resources to try to get ahead of the other fellow and to achieve as much of the fulfillment of life as you can. And let me tell you - anytime you believe this script that comes from Satan himself, you go back to acting as you once did - back to the misery, back to the heartaches. You can escape that only when you come back again to this central truth - we are alive in Jesus Christ!

So, when we become born again, we are no longer afraid of death, and no longer afraid to confront God. Oh, we may be feeling somewhat uncomfortable about God replaying our life for us on his mega-gigabyte hard drive, but we are no longer afraid to come into his presence because he is no longer seen as an enemy or a terrible judge. When we come to faith in Christ, we see Christ as our brother, and his father as our father, and we bask in a father's love, a father's arms, and a father's heart.

But Paul also says we are now raised up with Christ. What happened to him is what happened to us. And what happened to him? He died. And when they took his body down from the cross, it gave every evidence of death. His mouth was open, his eyes were glazed, and that dead body was laid in the tomb. The utter, stark reality of that death cast a pall of gloom over the apostles. It dashed their hopes and was the end of all their dreams. The Lord was dead. But, on the third morning, God the Father infused into that dead body new life, and Jesus was made alive.

And that, Paul says, is an exact parallel to what happened to us when we were raised up with Christ. Into the death of our fallen humanity there came a new life, and new Spirit. The body of Jesus was not left alive in the tomb - he didn't remain there holding counseling sessions with those who came to visit him. Nope - he was raised up and put back into business. He was put back into life in order to operate once again, *but on a different basis and with a different power*. This is what Paul says happened to us when we were made alive in Christ.

We are called to go back into the same circumstances from which we came, into the same situation, but to reckon on a new power, to demonstrate a new power upon which to draw - the power of resurrection life enabled by the Holy Spirit. And this means that the Christian is able to do what she or he could never do alone - indeed, we are enabled to act in a way which is impossible to those who are without Jesus Christ.

Next week we'll focus on the events of Pentecost, but the week after that I want to come back right here and illustrate for you four actions we are enabled to do with Spirit-led resurrection power that we were never able to do before. But for today the important thing for you to remember is that you have been made alive with Jesus Christ - you are a miracle that has happened in this place. Remember that. And also remember that you have been raised up with Christ - and that happened for a purpose, so that you can get back out there, in the world, and be effective for glory of God. We may be helpless and hopeless on our own, but oh, with Jesus Christ, we can really get good stuff done.

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